

EARLY IRISH MISSIONS.

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II.

MISSIONARY LABOURS

OF

ST. COLUMBA AND HIS COMPANIONS

IN

SCOTLAND.

BY

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OUR illustrious countryman, Marianus Scotus, in his chronicle, under the year 589, compendiates in one short sentence the history of Ireland in that eventful period : "Ireland, the island of saints, is, to a sublime degree, full of holy men and of innumerable wonders."<sup>1</sup>

The name of St. Columba is, perhaps, the brightest that adorns this brilliant page of our country's history. Venerated at home for his sanctity and wondrous miracles, he has, from time immemorial ranked with St. Patrick and St. Bridget amongst the chief patrons of Erin, whilst abroad the grateful piety of those whom he evangelized has awarded him the *aureola* of chief Apostle of Caledonia. Many years indeed before the mission of our saint others had preached the faith in Dalriada and the southern districts of Alba, but in consequence of the continual wars and predatory incursions, piety had again grown cold, and the light of truth was well nigh spent. Columba revived there the spirit of piety, and renewed the fervour of Christian life. The Northern Picts, however, had never yet received the Gospel, but now that sanguinary and untamable race, which Imperial Rome could not subdue, was conquered by the Irish missionary. Before St. Columba had ended his glorious career the whole nation was gathered into the one true fold ; their glens and forests, their almost inaccessible mountains, and their distant islands were

<sup>1</sup> *Marianus*—“Hibernia, insula sanctorum, sanctis et mirabilibus perplurimis sublimiter plena habetur.” Pertz, *Monumenta Hist. Germ.* vii, 544.

studded with Christian churches and monasteries, and resounded with the praises of the Most High.

St. Columba<sup>1</sup> was born in Gartan, in the County Donegal, on the 7th December, in the year 521, the very day on which the great founder of Monasterboice passed to his reward. An ancient oratory still marks the place of his birth, and in the cemetery, close by, are two old Celtic crosses with St. Columba's well, whither pilgrims still flock to pay the tributes of their devotion on his festival. By paternal descent he was a scion of the royal house of the northern Hy-Niall, and his father, Fedhlimidh, belonged to the tribe of the Cinell Conaill, who were connected with the kings of Scottish Dalriada. His mother, Eithne, was of a princely family of Leinster. Before his birth she had a vision in which was foreshadowed the splendour of his future career. An angel appeared to her, bearing in his hand a veil of wonderful beauty, richly variegated with all kinds of flowers. Scarce, however, had she contemplated it for a little time, when he spread it out and allowed it to float away through the air. It gradually expanded as it became more and more distant, till at length mountains, forests, and plains were covered by its shadow. Then the angel said to her : "Thou art about to become the mother of a son who shall blossom for heaven : he shall be reckoned among the prophets of God, and shall lead numberless souls to the heavenly country."

This child of promise was from his infancy placed under the care of a holy priest, as Adamnan informs us. Whilst under his care, an Angel came one day to Columba and asked what special virtues he desired from God. The holy youth replied that he desired above all others virginity and wisdom. The Angel then announced to him that God approved his choice, and in token of approval would add the gift of prophecy to these virtues. Soon after, whilst Columba was

<sup>1</sup> Excellent popular lives of our saint have been published by Montalambert, in his "Monks of the West," and Sister Mary Francis Clare, in Kenmare Series, London, 1877. We are particularly indebted, however, to Dr. Reeves, in his edition of Adamnan's Life of St. Columba, and Mr. Skene, in "Celtic Scotland," vol. ii., Edinburgh, 1877, for the learning and erudition with which they have illustrated the early monuments connected with the saint and his companions.

engaged in prayer, three Maidens arrayed in heavenly light stood before him, but Columba heeded them not. "Dost thou not know us?" they asked. "We are the three sisters, Virginity, Wisdom and Prophecy, and we are sent by God to be your inseparable companions during your earthly pilgrimage."

As he grew in years we meet with him in the great schools of Moville, Clonard and Glasnevin.<sup>1</sup> Whilst he studied at Moville, situated at the head of Strangford Lough in the county Down, two brilliant lights were seen to illumine the heavens over the monastery, one golden as the sun, the other silvery as the moon. The holy Abbot and Bishop Finnian explaining this vision to his religious said, that Ciaran mac-an-Tsaeor (*i.e.* the son of the carpenter), who was one of their number, would be as the silvery light by his virtues and good deeds; but Columba would be as the golden sun, and "the fame of his exemplary piety and the brightness of his angelic life, his purity, his wisdom, his knowledge, his word, and his preaching, would extend over all the west of the world."<sup>2</sup>

At Glasnevin under the care of St. Mobhi, he had again S. Ciaran mac-an-Tsaeor, the future founder of Clonmacnoise, for his companion, and with them were Saints Canice and Comgall. One day as these young saints conversed together their conversation turned on the new church which the Abbot Mobhi had just completed there. St. Ciaran said he wished that it were full of holy men, who by night and day would sing the praises of God. St. Canice expressed his wish that it were full of sacred manuscripts which would lead many to the knowledge and the service of God. St. Comgall declared it would be his desire that all the pains and afflictions of this world were gathered into it, that he might suffer them all for the love of Christ. But Columba said he would wish it were filled with silver and gold, to relieve the poor

<sup>1</sup> At an early period of his life, on account of his uninterrupted devotion to study and prayer, he was called Columbkille, which may be interpreted Columba of the Church or Columba of the cell, and in either meaning, seems justly applicable to our Saint.

<sup>4</sup> Martyrology of Donegal, page 161.

and to found churches and monasteries. When this was told to the venerable Abbot, he prophetically announced that each of them would be blessed from heaven in accordance with the pious wishes they had expressed.<sup>1</sup>

The fame of Columba for sanctity and miracles soon became widespread throughout all Ireland. Derry was the first great monastery which he founded, but so untiring were his labours, so ardent his zeal, so generous the munificence of his princely friends, that in a few years innumerable other monasteries and churches sprung up in various parts of the kingdom, all honouring him as their patron and head. But all this did not suffice for Columba's zeal: he sighed for new nations whom he might light up with the fire of God's love and gather into the fold of Christ, and as he saw a vast missionary field open before him on the neighbouring shores of Alba, he resolved to make that the theatre of his labour, and to devote the remainder of his life to gather in there the harvest of God.

It has been sometimes stated, even by the most conscientious writers, that Columba was in his youth of an angry and vindictive spirit. So, too, it has been said that he more than once stirred up the Irish chieftains to civil strife, in order to avenge some supposed injuries which he had received; and it has been repeatedly asserted that it was in consequence of a penance of perpetual exile imposed on him for the wars he had instigated, and for the blood which was shed, that he was obliged to bid farewell to Ireland, and to seek a pilgrim's home on the coasts of Alba. For all this, however, there is not a vestige of proof to be found in our earliest and most authentic records. St. Adamnan attributes his journey solely to his boundless love of Christ,<sup>2</sup> and he supposes everywhere throughout his narrative that the saint had no other motive than a desire to carry the Gospel to a pagan nation, and to win souls to God. The old Irish Life of Columba assigns the same reason for his pilgrimage: "his

<sup>1</sup> *Colgan*, Trias, pag. 296.

<sup>2</sup> *Adamnan*, "pro Christo peregrinari volens," Praef. 2.

native country was abandoned by the illustrious saint and illustrious sage and son chosen of God, for the love and favor of Christ;" and again it adds that this was "the resolution which he had determined on from the beginning of his life," (Skene ii. 83, 491): and the Venerable Bede presents the simple record—"there came from Ireland into Britain a famous priest and abbot, a monk by habit and life, whose name was Columba, to preach the Word of God."—(Hist. Ecc. iii., 4). We have further the clearest evidence that the character of Columba was quite free from the asperity and vindictiveness attributed to him. His contemporary, Dallan Forghaill, speaks of him as "a perfect sage, believing in Christ, learned, and chaste, and charitable: he was noble, he was gentle, he was the physician of the heart of every sage: he was a shelter to the naked, a consolation to the poor: there went not from the world one who was more constant in the remembrance of the cross."<sup>1</sup> The ancient gloss on St. Ængus's Feliré or Metrical Calendar of Saints also commemorates him as "having given the most intense love to Christ in his youth;" and, not to mention other authorities, Adamnan thus sketches his true character: "From his boyhood he had been brought up under Christian training, in the study of wisdom, and, by the grace of God, he so preserved the integrity of his body and the purity of his soul that, though dwelling on earth, he appeared to live like the saints in heaven. He was angelic in appearance, graceful in speech, holy in work, with talents of the highest order, and consummate prudence. . . . He never could spend the space even of one hour without study, or prayer, or writing, or some other holy occupation. So incessantly was he engaged night and day in the unwearied exercise of fasting and watching, that the burden of each of these austereities would seem beyond the power of all human endurance. And still in all these he was beloved by all—for a holy joyousness ever beaming on his countenance revealed the joy and gladness with which the Holy Spirit filled his inmost soul."—(*Adamnan*, praef. 2.)

<sup>1</sup> *Dallan Forghaill*.—"Amra," edited by Mr. Crowe, 1871.

Being connected by birth, as we have seen, with the royal houses of Ulster and Leinster, St. Columba's words and actions may often indeed have been regarded with jealousy by contending chieftains, and may at times have given occasion to quarrels between them ; but in such quarrels Columba had no part. Adamnan relates that many venerable seniors being on one occasion assembled at Tailten in Meath, were induced by some such accusations, which had been made against Columba, to cut him off from their communion ; but he adds that the accusations thus made were soon found to be groundless and unjust. Whilst the assembly was still sitting Columba presented himself before them. St. Brendan, of Birr, at once arose from his seat, and with head bowed down reverently kissed him : and when called to an account for thus showing respect to one whom they had a little before cut off from their communion, St. Brendan replied : If you had seen what the Lord has vouchsafed to manifest to me regarding him, you would never have passed such an unjust sentence against one whom God has chosen to be the leader of his people to life. He added : "I saw a most brilliant pillar of light preceding this man of God as he approached, and I saw that the holy Angels accompanied him whom you would treat with contempt." It needed but few words from Columba to set matters in their true light, and, as the result, the preceding unjust censure was removed, and thenceforth all treated him with the greatest respect and reverence.

Before embarking on his mission, Columba proceeded to Inishmurray, off the coast of Sligo, to enjoy a short interval of spiritual repose, and to take counsel with the holy Bishop, St. Molaise, who had chosen that island for his retreat. Thirteen centuries have wrought but little change on the rocky islands off our Western coast. The bee-hive cells and oratories and enclosures of Inishmurray, though they betray, indeed, unmistakably the hoary mark of centuries, yet are in a wonderful state of preservation, and we may safely affirm that they are the very same in which, during his sojourn there, St. Columba dwelt and prayed. St. Molaise exhorted him earnestly to persevere in his generous enterprise,

and promised him in God's name, that from the dreary shore of Alba he would lead countless souls to heaven.

It was in the year 563 that Columba at length entered his little coracle or osier boat, and accompanied by twelve companions,<sup>1</sup> set out on his great missionary enterprise. One of his companions, named Mochonna, was the son of an Ulster chieftain, and Columba represented to him the great good he could effect at home without abandoning his parents and his native land, but the young religious replied : " It is thou who art my Father, and the Church is my Mother, and my country is wheresoever I can gather the largest harvest for Christ ; " and lest further entreaties should be made to him, he added : " I have vowed to follow thee whithersoever thou goest, until thou hast led me to Christ, to whom thou hast consecrated me." This instance shows the devoted spirit which animated the companions of Columba, and made them worthy to share in the glory and the fruits of his Apostolate.

St. Columba chose for his new monastic home a small island, now generally called Iona, but which for centuries was known by no other name than Hy-Columbkille, *i.e.* "Columba's Isle." According to the Irish Life of the Saint, it was on Whitsun eve, which, in that year, fell on the 12th of May, that he arrived in the island. It was admirably suited for his missionary purposes. Situated mid-way between the conflicting nations whom he had come to evangelize, his monastery was sufficiently separated from the mainland, whilst at the same time it was easily accessible alike to his kinsmen of Dalriada and to the Picts of North Caledonia.

Those who pay merely a hurried visit to Iona in an excursion steamer with a crowd of tourists, can see little more than a desolate-looking island with a few grey ruins, forming a striking contrast with the fertile soil and the basaltic rocks of the neighbouring islands. And yet Iona has its hidden

<sup>1</sup> The following are the names of the twelve companions of St. Columba, as given in a MS. of the British Museum, compared with our ancient Calendars : " Baithene who was also called Conin : Cobthach brother of Baithene : Ernan : Diarmaid : Ruislein and Fiachna brothers : Scannal : Lugaid : Eochaid : Mochonna : Caornan and Greallan."

beauties, "its retired dells, its long reaches of sand or shores, indented with quiet bays, its little coves between bare and striking rocks, and the bolder rock scenery of its north-western and south-western shores, where it opposes wild barren cliffs and high rocky islets to the sweep of the Atlantic.<sup>1</sup>" It is about three miles and a half in length, and about a mile and a half in breadth, and it is separated only by a narrow channel from the large island of Mull, whilst an archipelago of small islands is dotted at some distance to the north and south. It has a stream of pure water and it has also some verdant fertile plains<sup>2</sup> particularly in the centre of the island, and thence extending along the eastern shore, and sloping gently towards the sea. To the north-west, there is a tract of wilder ground, consisting of small grassy patches, alternating with rocky elevations, which culminate in the highest hill in the island. The north-east has a beach of the purest white sand, and often must Columba have gazed on it with sadness, did he foresee that its snowy whiteness would be empurpled one day with the blood of the religious of Iona, cruelly slaughtered there by the Danes. The ruins which still remain belong to a comparatively modern age, but they probably mark the original sites where stood the oratory, the monastic enclosure and the cell of Columba.

The holy pilgrims landed towards the south of the island at a little bay still called *Port-a-churich*. An ancient tradition says that they first sailed to the island of Oransay, but as from its hills they could catch a glimpse of the distant shores of Ireland, Columba told them to proceed onward, for he feared too frequent distractions from the lively emotions which the sight of his native land would not fail to excite in his bosom.<sup>3</sup> On landing in Iona Columba proceeded to the top of

<sup>1</sup> *Skene, Celtic Scotland, II., 89.*

<sup>2</sup> Innes writing in the beginning of the last century calls Iona "a pleasant and fertile little island" (page 151); and again he describes it, as "fertile of all things which that part of the climate produces." (page 162) 'Civil and Ecclesiastical History of Scotland,' printed by the Spalding Club, Aberdeen, 1853.

<sup>3</sup> The Duke of Argyll in his "Iona," after remarking that St. Columba sailed on till he had got out of sight of Ireland, says: "He could not bear to see it and live out of it. The passionate love of an Irish Celt for his native land seems to have burned in him with all the strength which is part of a powerful character," (page 78).

its highest hill, and as Ireland could no longer be seen, he at once chose it for his monastery. On the summit of that hill, where thus Columba sadly stood for a while stretching his looks towards Ireland, the monks in after-times erected a Cairn, and called it Cul-ni-Eri, *i.e.* ‘the farewell to Erin.’

On the eastern coast of this little island, Columba and his religious brethren proceeded to erect their oratory and monastic cells, rude wooden structures, formed for the most part of wattles or coarse planks, and covered with reeds or branches of trees. In the centre, on a slight elevation of the ground, was placed the *tuguriolum*, as Adamnan calls it, *i.e.*, the little cell of the Abbot. Such were the humble beginnings of the monastery destined to be for centuries the spiritual capital of Caledonia, the fortress of the Faith for the Picts and Scots, and the great centre of Christian civilization for all North Britain. Even religious bigotry and national prejudice are constrained to remain silent in the presence of Iona; and although this far-famed monastery thus founded by an Irish saint, was in after years fed with a never-failing stream of Irish disciples, and derived its chief renown from Irish genius and Irish sanctity, thus blending together the national glory and the peaceful triumphs of religion, yet Scottish writers, who have but little sympathy with St. Columba’s country or his creed, have not failed to offer it the due meed of praise, and to acknowledge the manifold blessings which it conferred on Scotland.

Who is there that does not know the beautiful words which Johnson wrote when a century ago he visited its historic ruins: “We are now treading that illustrious island which was once the luminary of the Caledonian regions, whence savage clans and roving barbarians derived the benefits of knowledge and the blessings of religion. . . . Far from me and from my friends be such frigid philosophy as may conduct us indifferent and unmoved over any ground which has been dignified by wisdom, bravery, or virtue. That man is little to be envied whose patriotism would not gain force upon the plain of Marathon, or whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of Iona.”

Chambers in his "Caledonia" writes : "St. Columba came not to destroy, but to save ; not to conquer, but to civilize. His name will always be remembered as the disinterested benefactor of Scotland. . . . Let us not think lightly of the saints of Iona, who were the instructors of our fathers while they were ignorant, and the mollifiers of our progenitors while they were still ferocious. The learning, I was going to say the charity, of those ages centred all in Iona. It received the persons of living kings who retired from unstable thrones, and it equally admitted dead kings from the bloody field. From this seminary went out the teachers of the Caledonian regions. To this school the princes of Northumberland were sent, and acquired the light of the Gospel from the luminaries of Iona."

So too the Duke of Argyll, in his work on Iona, published in 1870: "Columba was an agent, and a principal agent, in one of the greatest events the world has ever seen, namely—the conversion of the northern nations. . . . .

. . . Christianity was not presented to the Picts of Caledonia in alliance with the impressive aspects of Roman civilization. The tramp of Roman legions had never been heard in the Highland glens, nor had their clans ever seen with awe the majesty and power of Roman government. In the days of Columba, whatever tidings may have reached the Picts of Argyll, or of Inverness, must have been tidings of Christian disaster and defeat. All the more must we be ready to believe, that the man who at such a time planted Christianity successfully among them must have been a man of powerful character and of splendid gifts. There is no arguing against that great monument to Columba, which consists in the place he has secured in the memory of mankind."

The same grateful sentiments have been gracefully expressed in verse by Mr. Jesse :

" Ye who have sailed among the thousand isles,  
Where proud Iona rears its giant piles,  
Perchance have lingered at that sacred spot,  
To muse on men and ages half forgot,

Though spoiled by time, their mould'ring walls avow  
 A calm that even the sceptic might allow.  
 Here where the waves these time-worn caverns beat,  
 The early Christian fixed his rude retreat ;  
 Here first the symbol of his creed unfurled,  
 And spread religion o'er a darkened world."

For two years Columba chiefly applied himself to mould the religious spirit of his new community, and to lay deep the foundations of the great spiritual edifice which he desired to raise. He loved to teach his Religious by example as well as by precept. In prayer, and penance, and labour he was at all times foremost among them. He slept on the hard floor of his little cell. His prolonged prayers excited the admiration and almost the alarm of his disciples. He took part in the out-door work even as the least of the community, and he added to this the toil of transcription of the Sacred Scriptures. To labour in transcribing the sacred text had been the passion of his youth, and it continued to be his cherished occupation to the last day of his old age. Among the manuscripts which have come down to us from the golden ages of our country's faith none surpass the Book of Kells, and other monuments of his piety and skill, and a venerable tradition attests that he transcribed no fewer than three hundred copies of the Gospel. He was at the same time a model of humility. He knelt before the strangers who came to Iona, and before the monks returning from their work, washed their feet, and after having washed them respectfully kissed them. His charity made him all to all. He was indifferent to no spiritual or temporal want of those who approached the monastery. Often he was seen to weep over those who in their obduracy would not weep for their own miseries. These tears were at times the most eloquent part of his preaching, and when every other argument had been fruitless, they seldom failed to soften and subdue those savage but simple and earnest souls whom God had entrusted to his care.

No wonder that the fame of such charity and piety would

soon attract to Iona not only crowds of Columba's kinsmen from Dalriada, but also countless pilgrims from other parts of Britain and from Ireland, desirous to save their souls and gain heaven under the directions of the man of God. Thus was the seed sown, which, in God's own time, was destined to yield an abundant harvest.

It was one of St. Columba's first cares to visit his cousin, Conal, King of Dalriada, who dwelt at the royal fortress of Cindelgend, in the peninsula of Kintyre. He welcomed our Saint with every mark of respect and joy, and at his request made him a formal grant of the island of Iona.<sup>1</sup> A venerable Scottish tradition tells us that the curious cave chapel of Cove, on Loch Caolisport, which still bears the name of Columba, was founded by the Saint during this his first visit to the mainland: it thus would rival Iona in antiquity, and should justly be styled the earliest church founded by St. Columba in Scotland.

It was not till the year 565, two years after his landing in Iona, that Columba ventured to present himself before Brude, son of Maelochon, the monarch of the Pictish nation. This valiant prince, who is styled by Venerable Bede<sup>2</sup> "a most powerful King," was now in the eighth year of his reign. He had vanquished the Scots or Dalriadians on many a hard-fough battle-field, and triumphed over all his other enemies, and his kingdom being now in peace he had fixed his royal residence at his chief fortress near Inverness. Some writers, with Dr. Reeves, place this fortress at the vitrified fort now called *Craig Patrick*, which crowns the summit of a rocky hill nearly 500 feet high, two miles west of the river Ness. Others have pointed out the gravelly ridge called Torvean, situated about a mile south-west of Inverness, part of which is encircled with ditches and ramparts, and which must have been in early times a fort of considerable strength. With two companions Columba entered his little

<sup>1</sup> The oldest of our Irish chroniclers, Tighernac, in recording the death of Conal in 574, says, that in the 13th year of his reign, "he immolated the island of Hy to Columkille," see Skene, Chron. of Picts and Scots, page 67, and Celtic Scotland, ii. 86.

<sup>2</sup> Bede, Eccles. Hist. iii. 4. "regē potentissimo."

oziest skiff, and traversing Loch Ness and the river which issues from it, presented himself at the doors of the royal mansion. The writers of St. Columba's Acts do not record the names of the two companions chosen by the Saint to be with him on this important occasion, so momentous in its results and so fruitful of blessings to the Pictish nation. The Life of St. Comgall, however, supplies this omission. It tells us that his companions on that day were St. Comgall, the illustrious founder of Bangor, and St. Canice, the great patron of this city. The King, unwilling to receive the Irish missionaries, ordered the gates to be closed against them ; but they had recourse to prayer, and Comgall having made the sign of the cross on the outer gates, they immediately fell broken to the ground. Columba made the sign of the cross on the inner door of the enclosure with the same effect. When the strangers stood before the King, he drew his sword, swearing by his false gods that he would avenge the insult offered to him, but St. Canice, making the sign of the cross towards him, his hand was instantly withered, and it so remained till he believed in God and received baptism from Saint Columba.<sup>1</sup>

After such miracles Columba obtained, without difficulty, permission to preach the Faith throughout the Kingdom, and moreover the possession of Iona was confirmed to him by the Pictish monarch,<sup>2</sup> so that he now held it under the double protection of the rival Kings who shared Caledonia between them. An ancient Irish record registers another incident of this visit : " Mailchu, it says, the King's son, came with his Druid to contend against Columba and to uphold paganism, but both perished at the prayer of Columba."<sup>3</sup>

We have only a few details regarding our Saint's labours among the Picts, and yet it is beyond controversy that the thirty-two years which still remained of Columba's life were

<sup>1</sup> Vita Comgalli, cap. 44. See also Skene ii. 107. Venerable Bede dates the arrival of Columba in Scotland from this visit to the King, which took place in 565.

<sup>2</sup> The 'Liber Hymnorum' in the preface to the hymn 'Altus Prosator,' states that Brude "immolavit Columbae Hi" (pag. 204.) The Venerable Bede writes that the island "donatione Pictorum, qui illas Britanniae plagas incolunt, jamdudum monachis Scottorum tradita." (Eccles. Hist. iii. 3.)

<sup>3</sup> Irish Life of St. Columba, in Advocates' Library. Skene, ii. 108.

chiefly devoted to missions throughout the deep glens and hillys traths north of the Grampian range ,and in the numerous islands scattered along the Scottish coast which were subject to the Pictish rule. All the ancient writers attest with one accord, that before he closed his missionary career he had gathered all that nation into the fold of Christ. I will briefly put together the few scattered fragments relating to this Pictish mission, though they probably belong to far separated periods of our Saint's life.

Adamnan tells us that when "Columba had been tarrying some days in the province of the Picts," he converted a certain family, so that the husband and wife with their children and domestics were all baptized. A few days afterwards one of the sons was attacked by a dangerous illness and was brought to the point of death. Then the Druids began to upbraid the parents, and to extol their own gods as more powerful than the God of the Christians. The sick child died; but Columba, burning with a holy zeal to vindicate the glory of God, came to the house of mourning, and, his face bedewed with tears, prayed for a long time: then turning to the deceased he said, "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ arise :" and taking the child by the hand he raised him up and restored him to his parents. By this miracle their sorrow was changed into joy, and many in the neighbouring districts received the truths of eternal life.

Again we are told that Columba, when staying among the Picts, heard that there was a fountain among the heathen people where the demon was worshipped as God, and that all who drank of its water or washed in it, were struck by demoniacal art and suffered excruciating torture. Columba proceeded to the fountain, and having blessed its water, drank of it and washed with it, to let the poor deluded people see that Satan was powerless against God. From that day the waters of the fountain became a source of blessing and wrought innumerable cures.

Broichan, who was the foster-father and chief Druid of King Brude, had used all his arts in vain to prevent Columba

from approaching the royal mansion. He announced, however, that destruction awaited the missionary, and that the elements would not allow him to pursue in safety his homeward journey. Scarce had Columba set sail on Loch Ness when the sky was darkened and a tempestuous contrary wind began to blow. Columba armed himself with the sign of the cross, and fearlessly entering his little barque, it sped its way as safely and as swiftly as though it enjoyed a most favourable breeze.

Our Saint, in one of his excursions to the north of the Grampian range, said to the disciples who accompanied him : "Let us make haste and meet the Angels who have come down from heaven and await us, that they may bring the soul of a dying man to heaven :" this was an old Pictish chief who had led an exemplary life even to extreme old age, and was now on the point of death in the district of Glen-Urquhart. Columba outstripped his companions in the eagerness of his haste ; and the sick man heard from him with joy the Word of God, and being baptized, rested in peace. His son, with his whole house, received at the same time the sacrament of Baptism. Another time St. Columba was staying in the island of Skye when a boat came into the harbour with a feeble old man seated on the prow. He was the chief of one of the neighbouring Pictish tribes, and it was his only desire that he might become a Christian before death : two young men taking him from the boat laid him at the feet of the Saint. Columba briefly instructed him in the truths of life, and having administered Baptism to him, he died on the same spot and was buried there, and his companions raised a cairn of stones to mark his grave.

Through the powerful patronage of King Brude, St. Columba secured the protection of the chieftains who ruled over the neighbouring islands. On one occasion we find him staying at the royal mansion, and in the presence of the Chieftain of the Orkney Islands thus addressing the King : "Some of our brethren have set sail, anxious to discover a *desertum*, i.e., a place of spiritual retreat, in the pathless sea.

Should they happen, after many wanderings, to come to the Orkneys, be pleased to carefully instruct this Prince, whose hostages are in thy hand, that no evil befall them within his territory." Adamnan tells us that St. Columba thus spoke because he prophetically foresaw that in a few weeks some of his religious would visit those islands. The Chieftain, on his return, was not unmindful of the commission thus given him, and when the Religious visited the Orkneys, he received them with great affection, and granted to them every privilege that they desired.

In the famous poem composed by Dallan Forghaill, the chief poet of Erin, in praise of St. Columba, special mention is made of the voice of our Saint as being strong and sweet and sonorous to a most remarkable degree. Adamnan, indeed, mentions it as a miraculous gift, that whilst to those who recited the divine office with him in the Church, his voice did not seem louder than that of others, yet at a distance of more than a quarter of a mile, it could be distinctly heard by the Religious, so much so that they could mark each syllable of the verses which he chanted. In one of his missionary excursions St. Columba, whilst reposing with his companions outside the fortifications of the royal residence, not far from the borders of Lough Ness, chanted the psalms and hymns of vespers. The Druids coming near to them did all that they could to disturb them in their devotions and to prevent God's praises being sung so close to the head quarters of their pagan superstition. Seeing their intent, the holy man began to sing the 44th psalm, "*Eructavit cor meum verbum bonum: dico ego opera mea regi,*" and so wonderfully loud, like pealing thunder, did his voice become, that the Druids fled away, and the King and his attendants were filled with terror.

Although King Brude had renounced the worship of the false gods, nevertheless, the chief Druid Broichan, who was his foster-father, did not cease to exercise great influence in the royal councils. St. Columba in one of his visits to Lough Ness, found that a poor Irish girl, a Christian, was among the slaves of Broichan. He urgently requested that she might be

set free, but his request was rudely refused. St. Columba threatened the Druid with the judgments of God, but in vain. The Saint accordingly took his departure, but had not proceeded far when Broichan became dangerously ill, being struck by an Angel of God. Two messengers from the King hastened after our Saint, informing him that the Irish slave had been released, and praying him to return and restore the Druid to health. Columba returned thanks to God for freeing the poor Christian girl from slavery, and taking up a pebble, blessed it, and gave it to some of his companions, telling them to return with the King's messenger, and to dip this pebble in a little water which they would give to drink to Broichan. The Druid drank of the water and was immediately healed. Adamnan tells us that the pebble thus blessed by Columba was afterwards preserved among the chief treasures of the King.

In the year 584 King Brude died, and Gartnaidh, a Christian chieftain of the Southern Picts, being summoned to succeed him, consolidated the work of Saint Columba, and secured the permanent triumph of the Faith among the Picts. He fixed his royal seat at Abernethy, on the southern bank of the Tay, near its junction with the river Earn. Under the guidance of Columba he there erected a noble church and dedicated it to God, under the invocation of St Bridget.<sup>1</sup>

So untiring was our Saint in his missionary toil, that, according to an ancient tradition, he founded no fewer than three hundred churches throughout Caledonia and the adjacent isles. At each of these he left one or more of his religious brethren, who carried out the instructions of their master, and perfected the work which he had begun. Modern

<sup>1</sup> St. Bridget's Church at Abernethy has long since disappeared, but a Round Tower, one of those venerable monuments so characteristic of our early Irish ecclesiastical architecture, remains still to mark the site. The tradition of Scotland is that an earlier foundation had been made here by a Pictish Prince, who when an exile in Ireland in the beginning of the 6th century had learned to venerate St. Bridget. It is also the tradition that nine holy virgins, nuns of St. Bridget's Community, died there within a few years, and were interred in the northern part of the Church. From the Registry of St. Andrew's it further appears that the Priors of Abernethy continued for many years to be chosen from the ranks of the Irish Clergy.

research has discovered and registered the traces of at least ninety of these venerable foundations, and many are the holy associates of St. Columba who share with him the honours of the altar in the Scottish Calendars.

Upon the Eastern coasts of Scotland, in the district now known as Beecham, various churches trace their origin to an Irish disciple of Columba named Drostan. When our Saint, with some devoted disciples, was there announcing the glad tidings of the Gospel, he asked the *Mormaer*, or chief of the territory, to grant them a site on which to erect an oratory. This he indignantly refused, but his son fell dangerously ill, and he at once hastened after the Missionaries, offering them the land which they required, and begging them to pray for the dying boy. They prayed, and the child was restored to health. The Oratory was soon erected, and Columba, having blessed and installed there St. Drostan, proceeded onwards to evangelize other districts. When Drostan saw himself thus about to be separated from his loved master, he could not restrain his tears. But Columba, calling to mind the Gospel words, "He who sows in tears shall reap in joy," said to his disciple: "Let us call this place 'the Monastery of Tears,' and the great Abbey which was erected there, and for a thousand years was so replete with every blessing of earth and of heaven, always retained that name. After the death of St. Columba, the devoted Drostan betook himself to an eremitical life, and built a church at Glenesk, where he was famed for miracles and sanctity. The ancient Breviary of Aberdeen marks his festival on the 15th of December, and adds, that "his relics are preserved in a stone tomb at Aberdour, where many sick persons find relief."

St. Moluog, whose name is sometimes latinized Luanus, was one of the most successful missionary companions of St. Columba. He had been trained to the religious life by St. Comgall at Bangor. St. Bernard, recounting the glories of that great monastery, tells that Comgall had been the father of many thousand monks: "Verily, he adds, the place was holy and fruitful in saints, plentifully rendering a harvest to

God, so that one of the sons of that sacred family, Luanus by name, is said himself alone to have been the founder of one hundred monasteries. And this I state that from this example the reader may conjecture how great was the multitude of the rest. Finally, their schools so filled both Ireland and Scotland, that these verses of David seem to have predicted those very times:—"Visitasti terram et inebriasti eam : multiplicasti locupletare eam ... Rivos ejus inebrians, multiplica genimina ejus : in stillicidiis ejus laetabitur germinans." Ps. lxiv. 10. St. Moluog founded the great monastery of Lismore in Scotland, and his Church became, in after times, the Cathedral of the Diocese of Argyle. His bell was held in great veneration there till the time of the Reformation, and his pastoral staff passed into the possession of the Duke of Argyle, in whose collection it is still preserved. St. Ængus in his *Feliré* or Metrical Catalogue of Saints, styles him, "Luoc the pure and brilliant, the Sun of Lismore of Alba." Marianus O'Gorman also commemorates him as, "Moluoc the hospitable and decorous, from Lismore in Alba." (Colgan, *Trias*, pag. 481). The Martyrology of Aberdeen declares him to have been "full of the spirit of prophecy," and the ancient Breviary of Aberdeen relates that on the Scottish coast "he preached and built many churches in honour of God and his Mother Mary." He died before St. Columba, on the 25th June, 592.

St. Donnan was already mature in sanctity when he came from Ireland to Iona. After being some time there, he prayed St. Columba to become his *Amchara*, i.e., his soul's-friend or Confessor. St. Columba replied that he was not worthy to become the soul's-friend of one who was chosen to receive the Martyrs' crown, thus prophetically announcing that Donnan was predestined to glorify God by martyrdom. He erected a monastery in the Island of Eig, and such was its fame for piety and discipline, that many Religious came from Ireland to enrol themselves among its members. On Sunday, the 17th April, 617, a body of Picts, instigated by one of the neighbouring chieftains, surrounded the oratory at Eig,

whilst St. Donnan, assisted by his fifty-two Religious brethren, was solemnly offering up the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Only one request was made by the venerable Abbot, viz., that, as they were offering sacrifice to God, they would be permitted to finish the sacred rite. This the Picts acceded to, and when the Holy Sacrifice was ended at the altar, the Religious joyfully offered themselves a sacrifice to the Most High, and all received the martyrs' crown. In after times, this monastery of Irish monks was renewed at Eig, and at least four successors of St. Donnan are named in our Irish Calendars. St. Donnan's well is still pointed out in the island : other memorials are preserved at Kildonan, on the bank of the Helmsdale river, in the valley called Strath-Iugh, and his pastoral or abbatial staff was held in great veneration at Austerless, an island parish of Aberdeenshire, but was broken and destroyed by the so called Reformers.<sup>1</sup>

Popular tradition also reckons St. Moelisa, or Molios, among the illustrious Irish companions of St. Columba. He preached the faith in various parts of Scotland, but chose a cave in the west of Arran, off the Scottish coast, as his chief place of retirement, and there he spent whole days in prayer and penance. The Arran islanders honour him as their patron : his hermitage was for centuries a famous resort of pilgrims from the mainland and the adjoining islands, and the names of many of these pious votaries of our Saint remain rudely scratched on its sandstone roof. The cave of St. Molios looks out upon the sea, and is scooped in the rock about twenty-five feet above the present sea level. A few yards to the

<sup>1</sup> The Martyrology of Tallaght gives the names of the martyred religious of Eig as follows, on the 17th April: "Donnani Egha cum sociis ejus LII: hi sunt Aedani: Tarloga bis: Mairie: Congaile: Lonain: Mac Lasre: Johain bis: Ernain: Ernini: Baethini: Rotain: Andrlrog: Carillog: Rotain: Fergusain: Rectaire: Connidi: Endae: Mac Loga: Guretii: Juncti: Corani: Baetani: Colmain: Tem-lugi: Lugedo: Luctai: Gracind: Cucalini: Cobrain: Connind: Cummini: Baltani: Senaig: Demmain: Cummeni: Tarlugi: Finani: Findchain: Findchon: Cronani: Modomma: Cronain: Ciarian: Colmain: Naummi: Demmani: Ernini: Ailchon: Domnani." (From the original vellum MS. now preserved among the St. Isidore's MSS.) The original MS. of the Tallaght Martyrology has further on the 19th of April the following entry which is omitted in the printed text: "Communis sollemnitas omnium sanctorum et virginum Hiberniae et Brittaniae et totius Europae, et specialiter in honorem sancti Martini Episcopi. Et familiae Ego elivatio." Again on the 30th April it has: "Familiae Ega, ut alii dicunt."

south, a square block of red sandstone is called 'his resting place,' whilst a shelf cut in the hard rock in the side of the cave is still called his bed. Near the cave is the Saint's well, of purest crystal water, to which the Arran people still have recourse for its healing virtues.

Another disciple of Columba was the bishop and confessor St. Finnian, who gives name to the romantic glen of Glenfinnane. On a small green island in the adjacent loch, are the venerable ruins of a monastery founded by him, and its rude bell, said to have been used by the Saint to assemble the religious and faithful to the service of God, is still preserved there.

To St. Mochonna, also called St. Machar, of whom we have already spoken, is traced back the first foundation of the great church of Aberdeen. He was sent with twelve companions by St. Columba to preach the Gospel on the Eastern coast, and he was instructed to erect his monastery and church on the banks of a river, which, in its windings, would resemble the figure of a Bishop's crozier. Mochonna found the wished-for site near the mouth of the river Don, and there erected his oratory and cell, which, in after times, became the Cathedral of Aberdeen, dedicated to God under the invocation of our Saint. And so the wildest districts of Scotland, and the most remote of its islands, were visited and sanctified by the preaching of the disciples of Columba. We meet with their memorials in the steep and almost inaccessible island of St. Kilda, and their traditions still linger in the Hebrides and even in the far distant Shetland islands.

We have already seen how St. Columba chose SS. Comgall, and Canice for his companions when he paid his first memorable visit to King Brude. These saints are said by our ancient writers to have been connected by parentage with the Irish Cruithneach or Picts, and hence it may be supposed they were more familiar than Columba with the dialect of the Caledonian Picts. Adamnan, on another occasion, mentions that when the holy mysteries were celebrated by Columba on the Island of Hinba, there were present the same SS. Comgall

and Canice, as also St. Brendan and St. Cormac. These four Irish saints are styled by Adamnan, "founders of monasteries," and all four are honoured among the patrons of Scotland.

St. Comgall, who erected his famous monastery at Bangor, in the year 558, was visited there by St. Columba when preparing for his mission to Scotland, and some of the chief companions of our Saint seem to have been chosen from that great monastery. Bangor was, indeed, a great seminary of missionary saints, and we find St. Comgall eulogized in the Martyrology of Donegal as one "who fostered and educated very many other saints, and kindled and lighted up an unquenchable love of God in the hearts and minds of men." His chief Scottish foundation was in the Island of Tiree, where he built an oratory in 568. One curious fact connected with this Scottish settlement is recorded in his life. Whilst he was working in the fields at Tiree, he put his white hood over his garment. It happened that some heathen plunderers from the Picts came on that day to ravage the island. They seized on everything that was there, whether man or beast, but when about to lay hands on St. Comgall, they feared that the white hood might be his Deity, and, struck with fear, they fled from him. They carried off, however, all the brethren of the monastery, and all their substance. The plunderers, at the prayers of Comgall, were shipwrecked on the coast, and they then humbly came back to the Saint, restoring to him their plunder. Soon after, holy men from Ireland came and induced Saint Comgall to return to Bangor.

St. Canice's zeal and devoted toil were no less fruitful in Caledonia than in Ossory. He erected an oratory in Tiree Island, and the ruins of an ancient church, still called Kill-Chainnech, probably mark its site. He also erected cells in the Islands of Ibdon and Eninis (*i.e.* Island of Birds), and his memory was cherished there in after times. He was honoured even in Iona, where a burial ground still retains the name Kill-Chainnech. On the mainland he built for himself a rude hermitage at the foot of a mountain, in the Drumalban, or Grampian range, and we meet at the present day, fully cor-

responding to this description, towards the east end of Loch Laggan, the remains of an ancient church, called Laggan-Kenney, *i.e.*, St. Kenney's Church at Laggan. It is probably to this hermitage that the life of St. Canice refers when it tells us that the saints of Erin, being unwilling to be deprived of the prayers and counsel of Canice, sent messengers to him to Alba, praying him to return to his own country. They found him, adds the life, "living as a hermit in Britain, and Canice was then brought from his hermitage against his will." (*Vita*, cap. 19.) He founded also a monastery in the east end of the province of Fife, not far from where the River Eden pours its waters into the German Ocean. This place was then called *Rig-monadh*, or the Royal Mound ; and when in after times the noble Cathedral of St. Andrew's was erected on the site thus first hallowed by this Irish saint, we find that it continued for centuries to retain its Celtic name of Kilrimont, by which it is designated in the early charters. The Feliré of St. Ængus contains in its notes on St. Canice's feast at 11th October, a reference to this foundation in Alba : "Achadhbo is his principal church, and he has a Recles, *i.e.*, a monastery at Cill-Rigmonaig, in Alba." In many other places St. Canice seems to have erected cells or oratories. Of Maiden Castle, in Fife, Boece writes that in his time the remains of the great enclosed monastery, in which the religious brethren of St. Canice lived for centuries, could easily be traced. Indeed so many places retain his name and cherish his memory, that Scottish writers have not hesitated to pronounce him, after St. Brigid and St. Columba, "the favourite Irish saint in Scotland."—(*Forbes' Calendars*, pag. 297.)

St. Brendan, so famed for his seven years' pilgrimage by sea, also laboured for some time in Scotland. He was specially honoured in "the royal island of Bute"—as the Martyrology of Aberdeen styles it. Eassie, in Forfarshire, was dedicated to him, as was Kilbrandon in the Island of Seil, and also Culbrandon, *i.e.*, St. Brendan's Retreat, an island in the Garvelock group, and at least a dozen other places in various districts of Scotland.

St. Cormac was one of those *milites Christi*, or soldiers of Christ, for whom St. Columba secured a friendly welcome at the Orkney Islands, through the authority of King Brude. Three times, as Adamnan relates, St. Cormac betook himself to a long voyage by sea, in search of some desert island on which to found a hermitage, that by prayer and penitential exercises, he might there find his paradise. In his third journey he was exposed to special danger. In his frail coracle he was driven northward in a storm, fourteen days' sail, to regions hitherto unexplored, and what increased his peril, the sea was full of a sort of jelly-fish, which he had never before seen. Adamnan calls them "foul little stinging creatures, of the size of frogs," and adds, that they not only clung to the oar blades, but even beat with violence against the sides of the boat in which Cormac and his companions were, and which they expected every moment to be stove in. No wonder that the good monks were filled with alarm, and watered their cheeks with floods of tears, but Columba, far away in his island home at Iona, had a vision of all that they suffered, and summoning together the whole community, bade them pray for their struggling brethren at sea. In response to their prayers a north wind sprung up, which in a few days blew Cormac safe back to Iona, to tempt the waves no more. A short distance from the shore of South Knapdale, in Argyllshire, opposite to the old church of Kilmory, and its wonderful sculptured monuments, is a small island which is still called the "Island of the great Cormac." In our Irish church he was known as "Cormac of the sea, of spotless purity :" he is commemorated on the 21st of June, and is styled Abbot of Durrow, and Bishop and anchorite. He appears to have been specially beloved by his great master Columba, and it was to him that Columba addressed the remarkable words :

"Death is better in reproachless Erin  
Than perpetual life in Alba."

The island of Hinba, where Columba and these four saints met, has been of late identified with a small island called

Elachnave, a corrupt form of the name “Eileann-na-naoimh,” i.e., “the little island of the saints,” which is situated to the south of Iona, in the broad channel which separates Mull from the coast of Lorne. No spot could have been better chosen by these great men of God for spiritual conference. M‘Culloch has recorded his impressions on visiting it in 1824. On traversing it, he says, “I was surprised at the irregularity and beauty of a spot which seemed at a distance to be a bare hill, and of which, even from the creek where our boat was drawn up, no conjecture could have been formed. Surmounting one ridge after another, a succession of secluded valleys appeared, which, although without other wood than a few scattered bushes, were beautifully dispersed, and were interesting no less by their silence and seclusion than by the intermixture of rock and green pasture. It was impossible to imagine that we were here on a narrow spot surrounded by a wild sea, and far remote from the land: no sound of winds or waves, nor sight of water, interfering with the tranquillity and retirement of scenes which made us forget that the boisterous ocean was breaking all around.”—(*Highlands, &c.*, 11, 124.) Several interesting ruins are clustered together to the south-east of the island, and its beehive cells, which bear a striking resemblance to the primitive cells of the western coast of Ireland, and its oratory constructed of rude masonry, without lime or cement of any kind, betoken an age coeval with St. Columba. At the head of the narrow creek where the landing is usually made, is a little well which bears the name of Columba, and which tradition says he “fashioned and fructified in the living rock.” In a sheltered grassy hollow, there is an ancient cemetery: its rude headstones give evidence of a great age, but they have no inscriptions, and only one has a cross incised. On the face of the slope south of this cemetery, large stones are piled together like a rude altar, and close by is a square pillar stone, also bearing an incised cross, and locally regarded as marking the tomb of Eithne, mother of St. Columba. How solemn must have been the scene when the great Apostle of Caledonia, standing

at that rude altar raised by his own hands, on the hill side, under the broad canopy of heaven, offered to God the Holy Sacrifice, assisted by such holy men as Canice and Cormack, Brendan and Comgall.

To his own countrymen in the Scottish Kingdom of Dalriada, St. Columba was at the same time Apostle, father and legislator. When Conall, King of Dalriada, died in 574, the succession according to the law of Tanistry would have devolved on Eogan, son of Gabran. But though he was loved by our Saint with special affection, Columba announced to the assembled chieftains that an Angel had commanded him in vision to select as Sovereign Aidan, a younger brother of Eogan. The Angel he said held in his hand "a book of crystal containing the appointment of Kings on which the name of Aidan was inscribed," and said "Know for certain that I am sent to thee by God, that in accordance with the words written in this book thou mayest inaugurate Aidan into the Kingdom." Aidan was at once chosen King, and when he hastened to Iona to receive the blessing of the holy abbot, St. Columba, according to the rite shown him by the Angel, laid his hands upon his head and consecrated and blessed him and ordained him King. This is the first instance of Kingly consecration recorded in authentic history. Some modern writers, with Baring-Gould in his life of our Saint, and Smith in his "Dictionary of Christian Antiquities," in the article on "*Coronation*," inform us that Columba on this occasion enthroned Aidan on the celebrated stone of destiny, which was taken afterwards from Iona to Dunstaffnage castle, upon the coast of Argyle, and thence to the abbey of Scone, and was finally carried away by Edward the First to Westminster, where it still serves as a pedestal for the throne of the Kings of England on the day of their coronation. All this, however, is a mere fable which originated with Hector Boece, and has long since been exploded by the learned Scottish Antiquaries.

To place on a permanent footing, and to secure the independence of this Scottish Kingdom of Dalriada, St. Columba

soon after set out for Ireland, to assist at the great convention of the Irish Clergy and Princes which was summoned by Aedh, son of Ainmire, monarch of Ireland, to meet at Drumceatt, in the year 575. This great national convention was held in the county of Londonderry, on the banks of the Roe, about two miles from Newtownlimavady. The precise spot at which the Assembly met cannot be fixed with certainty, for whilst some of our Antiquaries place Drumceatt at Enagh, on the north side of the river, others mark out its site at Mullanlagh, in Roe-park on the southern side. It was not at all events far distant from Columba's great monastery at Derry, and as several matters of the deepest interest to our Saint were to be deliberated on at the assembly, he resolved to proceed thither with a most imposing retinue. The contemporary chief-poet of Erin, Dallan Forghaill, who himself was present at this convention, tells us that Columba went thither accompanied not only by Aidan the newly consecrated King of Dalriada, but also by "twenty noble worthy Bishops, forty Priests, fifty Deacons and thirty Students." When Columba came to the assembly all rose up before him to reverence and welcome him. At his request, the Irish Monarch renounced all sovereignty over the Kingdom of Dalriada in Alba, and whilst independence and freedom from tribute were thus guaranteed to the Scoto-Irish colonists, they on their part pledged themselves to a perpetual alliance, maritime expeditions being alone excepted, with their Irish countrymen.

There was another subject to be considered at this convention which also enlisted all the sympathies of Columba. The Bards had long been a privileged class in Erin. They were at once the poets and genealogists, the musicians and historians of the nation. They were invested with many special privileges, whilst favours were heaped on them alike by princes and people. One of their privileges however, called *conmed*, which gave them a right to exact refection from the tribes for themselves and their retinue, gave occasion to many complaints. Their great power too, and their excessive number, had produced great abuses, and so many

accusations had been made against them of insatiable greed and insolence, that the Irish Monarch deemed himself sufficiently strong to propose to the assembly at Drumceatt, that the troublesome order should be at length suppressed, and all the bards be banished from the Kingdom. Columba, who was himself a Poet, undertook their defence and pleaded their cause with eloquence and success. The King and the whole assembly yielded to his earnest pleadings, the Bards were spared, but it was decreed that their number should thenceforth be limited, and that their privileges should be restricted by certain rules, to be drawn up by Columba himself. The Bards on their part vowed an undying gratitude to their great patron, and the chief poet composed on this occasion his celebrated *Amhra* or Eulogy of St. Columbkille : but the saint saying that only the dead should receive praise, imposed silence upon him, and forbade him to repeat this poem so long as he himself should remain in the land of the living.

There was a third matter in which Columba and his friend St. Canice were deeply interested: this was the release of Scannlan-More, son of Cenfaeladh, King of Ossory, who seems to have been put in bonds for refusing to pay the customary tribute to the monarch. St. Columba failed to procure the immediate liberation of this prince, but he consoled him by the prophecy that he would soon be released, and would then rule for more than thirty years over his people. As a pledge that this prophecy would not be vain, he gave to the prisoner the pastoral staff which he had brought with him from Iona, which in after times was preserved as a most precious treasure in the Saint's monastery at Durrow.

This visit to Ireland and its assembled clergy and princes, many of whom were so dear to him, awakened the liveliest emotions in Columba's soul, for he had ever loved Erin and its people with the deepest love, and this love of country, instead of growing cold by his voluntary exile in Iona, became rather intensified into a most ardent affection. It was perhaps on his return to his island home from Drumceatt that he com-

posed the beautiful poem on Ireland, setting forth the romantic charms of its cliffs and scenery, and expressing the delight which would overflow his soul were it once more given him to visit its beloved shores :—

“ What joy to fly upon the white-crested sea, and to watch the waves that break upon the Irish shore ! What joy to row the little barque and to land amid the whitening foam upon the Irish coast ! Ah ! how my boat would fly if its prow were turned to my Irish oak-grove (*i.e.* to Derry). But the noble sea now carries me only to Alba, the land of ravens. There is a grey eye which ever turns to Erin. From the high prow I look over the sea, and great tears are in my eyes when I turn to Erin,—to Erin where the songs of the birds are so sweet, and where the priests sing like the birds ; where the young are so gentle and the old so wise. Noble youth, take my prayer with thee and my blessing, one half for Ireland—sevenfold may she be blessed ; and the other half for Alba. Carry my blessing across the sea, carry it to the west. My heart is broken in my breast ; if death comes to me soon, it will be because of the great love which I bear to the Gael.”

In Columba’s dealings with the penitents and pilgrims who flocked to Iona, as detailed by Adamnan, we easily recognise the same passionate love for his native land. The severest penance that he can devise for the guiltiest sinners, is never again to set foot upon Irish soil ; but when exhorting others to return home, as if he feared his own emotions should he pronounce the name of Erin, he tells them : you will return to the country that you love. It was on the monastery of Derry, however, that his affections were chiefly centered, and it is probable that after the Convention of Drumceatt he remained there for some time with his loved Religious. He beautifully gives expression to his esteem for this monastery in one of his poems :—

“ Were the tribute of all Alba mine,  
From its centre to its border,  
I would prefer the site of one hut  
In the middle of fair Derry.

The reason I love Derry is,  
 For its quietness, for its purity,  
 And for its crowds of bright angels  
 From the one end to the other.

The reason why I love Derry is,  
 For its quietness, for its purity,  
 Crowded full of heaven's angels  
 Is every leaf of the oaks of Derry.

My Derry, my little oak-grove  
 My abode and my little cell :  
 O eternal God, in heaven above,  
 Woe be to him who violates it."

With such an unbounded affection for the land of his birth, and with an unquenchable zeal for the spiritual welfare of his countrymen, it cannot surprise us that the Dalriadians were docile to his instructions, and received his precepts with joy, and welcomed as Angels of heaven the religious whom he sent amongst them. At the same time he was not blind to their faults, and he punished them with severity when he found them obdurate in their crimes. One instance will suffice. On the wild and barren peninsula of Ardnamurchan, a rocky mass which rises up out of the waves of the Atlantic, and forms the most western point of the Scottish mainland, there was a poor man, to whom the blessing of Columba had brought a manifold good fortune. Through gratitude he had assumed the name of his benefactor, and his neighbours called him Columbain, "the friend of Columba." A Scottish petty chieftain had twice plundered with impunity the home and the lands of this friend of the Abbot of Iona. A third time he set out on the same career of pillage, and landing with his attendants, seized on everything that Columbain possessed. Whilst laden with booty they were returning to their boat, St. Columba presented himself before them, and having reproved them for their many crimes, entreated them to restore their plunder. They remained silent till they gained the beach and entered the boat, but then they began to answer the abbot's prayers by

mockeries and insults. The Saint, however, did not cease his entreaties, and following them into the sea, up to his knees, he warned them not to inflict this injury on his poor friend; and when the boat moved off he remained there for a time motionless, bathed in tears, and with hands uplifted to heaven. Returning to some of his companions who were seated on a neighbouring mound, he said to them : "This miserable man shall never more land upon the shore from which you have seen him depart." Whilst he thus spoke a little cloud appeared on the horizon, and gradually it grew into a tempest, from which the spoilers sought in vain to escape. The storm reached them between the Islands of Mull and Colonsay, and their boat perished with all its crew and all its spoils.

St. Columba frequently visited the King of Dalriada, who was ever anxious to receive his counsel. One day Aidan presented his eldest son to receive the abbot's blessing. Columba, however, was not satisfied with seeing only the eldest. "Have you none younger," he asked, and he then added, "Bring them all, that I may fold them in my arms and on my heart." When the younger children were brought, one fair-haired boy, Eochaidh-Buidhe, came forward running, and threw himself upon the knees of the holy abbot. Columba held him long pressed to his heart, then kissed his forehead, and blessed him, prophesying for him a long and prosperous reign, and a happy posterity.

It was towards the close of his missionary career that St. Columba paid a visit to the great Apostle of the Strathclyde Kingdom, St. Kentigern. This venerable man, famed for his sanctity of life, and for the many trials he had undergone in the sacred cause of the Christian Faith, had at this time erected his Church on the banks of the Molendinor Burn, where the Cathedral of Glasgow now stands. Thither Columba proceeded, accompanied by several of his religious brethren, and advancing along the banks of the stream they chanted the 84th psalm—"The Saints shall advance from virtue to virtue, until the God of Gods be seen in Sion." St. Kentigern on his part summoned together the clergy and people to welcome

the holy visitors, and marshalling a procession in which the children came first, and then the more advanced in years, and last of all the holy Bishop himself with his senior clergy, all sang the 138th psalm—"In the ways of the Lord, how great is the glory of the Lord," with the versicle of Isaiah, "The way of the just is made straight, and the path of the saints is prepared."—(xxvi. 7.) Whilst they were yet at a distance, Columba saw a golden crown of heavenly light, set with sparkling gems, descending on the head of St. Kentigern, and he said to those around him : " It is given to me to know that like Aaron, he is the elect of God, for, clothed with light as with a garment, and bearing a golden crown, he appeareth to me with the sign of sanctity.' When they met, the holy men mutually embraced and gave the kiss of peace, and remained for a long time speaking of those things of heaven which were nearest to their own hearts, and taking counsel together regarding the interests of their people. On parting they interchanged their pastoral staffs in pledge and testimony of their mutual love in Christ ; and the ancient record adds, that " the staff which Saint Columba gave to the holy Bishop Kentigern was preserved for a long time in St. Wilfrid's Church at Ripon, and held in great reverence on account of the sanctity of him who gave it and of him who received it."<sup>1</sup>

It was at this time too, that, as an ancient and venerable tradition attests, Columba made a pilgrimage to Rome to visit the illustrious Pontiff St. Gregory the Great, who then sat on the chair of St. Peter. This tradition is referred to in the Irish life of St. Columba, and is registered in the life of St. Mochonna, and other ancient records : and when I resided some years ago in the Holy City, I found to my surprise that the old guides of the Vatican still preserved the same tradition, and pointed out in the ancient Basilica of St. Peter's, the spot on which the great Pontiff St. Gregory had given the kiss of peace to the venerable Irish pilgrim. Some time after his return from Rome, whilst

<sup>1</sup> See the Life of Saint Kentigern, in the ' Histories of Scotland,' vol. v. pag. 109. Edinburgh, 1874.

our holy Abbot was alone with Baithene on the island of Iona, seven Religious arrived there from the holy City; delegated by St. Gregory to present a collection of Latin Vesper Hymns and other precious gifts to Columba.<sup>1</sup> Among these gifts there was one which in after times was famous as "the great gem of Columbkille." It was shaped in the form of a cross, and, after being held in religious veneration for centuries by the community of Iona, was transferred to the monastery of Tory Island, off the coast of Donegal, where it was still preserved in the 16th century.<sup>2</sup> Columba in return bestowed many gifts on the Roman visitors, and he prayed them to present to the great Pontiff the hymn "Altus prosator," which he had composed some time before, and which, the ancient record adds, was gratefully received and highly prized by St. Gregory. Thus Columba's fame was spread to distant churches, and Adamnan reckons it among the favours granted to our saint by God, that "though he lived in a small and remote island of the British sea, yet his name is honoured, not only throughout the whole of our own Ireland and in Britain, but even in Spain and Gaul: and the renown of his sanctity hath also penetrated beyond the Alpine range into Italy, and into the city of Rome itself, which is the head of all cities."<sup>3</sup>

So attractive, nay, so charming, is the life of this great-Apostle of Caledonia, that we are tempted to linger on its most minute details. We must, however, hurry on, and I will merely add a few instances of the special virtues and heavenly favours which marked the close of his blessed life.

Adamnan particularly records that St. Columba was favoured with Angelic visions. One morning he said to the brethren : "I would be alone to-day in the little plain to the west of the island ; let no one follow me." A brother, more curious than the rest, disobeyed, and following him at a distance, saw him standing on a little mound, erect and

<sup>1</sup>This fact is recorded in the Preface to the hymn "Altus," composed by St. Columba, and preserved in the Leabhar Beac, and in the two ancient MSS. of the 'Liber Hymnorum' in the Library of T.C.D., and in the St. Isidore's Collection.

<sup>2</sup>Colgan, Trias, pag. 412 ; Reeves, Adamnan, pag. 318.

<sup>3</sup>"Quae caput est omnium civitatum." Adamnan, iii. 24,

motionless, whilst a crowd of Angels came down to converse with him. This hillock was known in Adamnan's time as "The Angels' Hill," and it retains the same name at the present day.

As he approached the end of his penitential life, he seemed to redouble his vigils, fasts, and other austerities, thus to make his soul more pure, and to lay up a better store of merits for heaven. On one occasion he went to a neighbouring island to seek greater retirement in prayer. He met there a poor woman gathering wild herbs and nettles, who told him that her poverty forbade her any other food. The holy man at once reproached himself that, though professing a life of penance, he was surpassed in austerities by this poor woman. Thenceforth he would use no other food but wild and bitter herbs, and he severely reproved his attendant Diarmaid, who, out of compassion for his master's old age and infirmities, wished to mix a little butter with such penitential fare.

The celestial light which was soon to be the eternal reward of his happy soul was granted to him by anticipation during the closing years of his life, and at times it invested him even as a golden radiant garment, especially when he was engaged in prayer. He had built for himself a solitary cell in the Isle of Hinba, near Iona, and the Religious, who stealthily kept watch around it, repeatedly observed that the cell was lighted up with surpassing brilliancy, whilst the Saint chanted spiritual canticles or remained entranced in God. One night a Religious, who was destined to succeed our Saint as fourth Abbot of Iona, remained in the Church of the Monastery whilst the others slept, and there he was privileged to see Columba enter the Church, preceded by a golden light, which filled the whole Church, even to the heights of the vaulted roof, and to the recesses of the lateral oratory in which he himself lay concealed. Those who passed near the Church during the night, while the holy Abbot prayed, were dazzled by the brilliancy of this sacred light : but the young Religious kept faithfully his secret till after the Saint's decease.

More than once Columba sighed to be freed from the bonds of the flesh, but it was hard for him to contend against the love of his disciples and their fervent prayers. Whilst two of the

brethren assisted him one day, they saw his countenance suddenly change. At first it was filled with a beatific joy, and he raised to heaven a look of the sweetest and tenderest gratitude ; but on a sudden this ray of supernatural delight was succeeded by an expression of profound sadness. They prayed him with tears not to conceal from them the revelation which he had received. " Dear children," he at length replied, " know that it is thirty years to-day since I began my pilgrimage in Alba. I have long prayed God to let my pilgrimage end with this thirtieth year, and to recall me to the heavenly country. When I was filled with joy, it was because I saw the Angels coming down to receive my soul. But I was saddened when they stopped in their course, for it pleased God to hear rather the prayers of the brethren, and to direct that I should still dwell in this body for four years."

These years, however, passed quickly on, and now the time was come for our Saint to receive his heavenly reward. Towards the end of May, in 597, he wished to visit the western part of the island to take leave of the monks who were working there. Being unable through age to proceed on foot, he was drawn thither in a car by oxen. When the religious brethren had gathered around him he said : " I greatly desired to depart to Christ a month ago on Easter-day, but I feared lest that joyous festival might be changed into a day of mourning and of sadness for you. Now my time is at hand." And when all wept he addressed words of consolation to them, and turning towards the east he prayed a blessing on the whole island and on those who dwelt in it. The following Sunday, the 2nd of June, he offered up with solemnity the holy sacrifice of the Mass, and as his eyes were raised to heaven, the brethren observed a sudden expression of rapture on his face. When interrogated by them, he told them that he had seen an Angel coming from heaven to bring some soul to God, and the Angel had looked down upon the brethren as they were assembled around the altar and blessed them. The following Saturday Columba went, leaning on his faithful attendant Diarmaid, to bless the granary of the monastery, and then uttered the prophetic words : " This day is called in

the Sacred Scriptures the Sabbath or day of rest, and it shall truly be my resting-day, for in it I shall repose after the fatigue of my labours, and this very night I shall follow in the way of my Fathers. Thou weeppest, Diarmaid, but console thyself. It is my Lord Jesus Christ who invites me to rejoin Him : and He has revealed to me that my summons shall come this night."

As he returned homewards towards the monastery, he seated himself for a little time half-way, where a cross was afterwards erected, which Adamnan writes was still standing in his time at the road side, and, I may add, the spot is still marked by one of the ancient Celtic crosses of Iona. Whilst he sat there the old white horse of the monastery came up, and placing its head on the Saint's bosom, by plaintive cries and tears expressed its grief. Diarmaid wished to drive the animal away, but Columba chiding him, said : "Let it alone, it is so fond of me it pours out its bitter grief, for it knows that its master is going to leave it." He then ascended the hillock which adjoined the monastery, and standing there for a little time with hands uplifted to heaven, he blessed the whole monastery, and uttered the prophecy thus registered by Adamnan : "Small and low though this place is, yet it shall be held in great and unusual honour, not only by the Irish kings and people, but also by foreign chiefs and barbarous nations ; and even the Saints of other churches shall regard it with no common reverence."

After this, descending from the hill, he entered his cell and began to work for the last time. He was then engaged in transcribing the Psalter, and having finished a page with these words of the 33rd Psalm, "*Inquirentes autem Dominum non deficient omni bono,*" "They who seek the Lord shall want nothing that is good," he paused and said : "I must stop here : let Baithen write what follows." Baithen was the Saint's successor in the abbacy, and the verse which followed was most appropriate to the father of his spiritual children : "Venite filii, audite me : timorem Domini docebo vos." "Come children, hearken to me : I will teach you the fear of the Lord."

Having laid aside the parchment, he entered the Church of the monastery to recite the nocturnal vigils of the Lord's

day ; and when these prayers were said he returned to his cell and lay down on his couch, not so much for repose as to perform his usual penitential exercise for the last time, for his bed was now a bare flag and a large stone served as his pillow ; and whilst he reclined there he commanded to his companion, his last words : “ This, dear children, is my last counsel to you ! Let peace and unfeigned charity at all times reign among you : if you thus follow the example of the Saints, the Lord, the comforter of the good, will be your helper ; and I dwelling with him, will intercede for you, that he may bestow not only the temporal blessings which you may stand in need of, but still more, the rewards of eternal life.” Having said these words, Columba remained in silence, but as soon as the bell had rung at midnight summoning the religious to prayers, he hastily arose, and running joyfully to the Church entered it alone, and kneltdown in prayer at the foot of the altar. Diarmaid who slowly followed, saw at that moment the whole interior of the Church filled with heavenly light, which however quickly disappeared ; and when he entered the Church he cried out in a plaintive voice, “ Where art thou, my Father,” and feeling his way in the darkness, for the brethren had not as yet entered with the lights, he found the saint lying before the altar, and raising him up a little, and sitting down beside him, he supported his holy head upon his bosom. Meantime the choir of monks came in, and beholding their father dying, whom they so loved, they began to weep. But Columba once more lifted up his eyes with a wonderful expression of joy and gladness, welcoming the angels who came to receive his soul ; and Diarmaid raising his hand, the venerable father made for the last time the sign of the cross over the assembled brethren, and having thus given them his holy benediction, his hand dropped down in death, but his countenance remained sweet and radiant, as if in sleep he enjoyed a vision of heaven.

Thus St. Columba died, on Sunday morning, the 9th of June, 597, after labouring for 34 years in his Apostolate of North Britain.



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